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ABSTRACT

The ability of community colleges to effectively fulfill the important roles assigned to them by society is determined by the management and leadership provided by those in positions of authority in the institutions. As community colleges look to the year 2000, leadership is needed to renew the colleges' commitment to the ideas which animate them and to create a climate that enhances excellence and promotes learning. The climate within which the faculty and staff work is created principally by the first and middle levels of administration; administrators work within a climate created by the chief executive officer (CEO); and the climate in which the CEO works is created by the board of trustees. For leadership to thrive within such a structure, individuals in positions of authority must encourage independent initiative and evoke a spirit of commitment and community within the college. Achieving a genuine spirit of community, characterized by fundamental respect and a hard-won understanding of individual differences, will require those in leadership positions to summon the will, create the ideas, and allocate the resources to overcome lingering prejudices based on color, culture, religion, sex, sexual preference, and age. Leaders must acknowledge the legitimate stake that every individual has in the institution and accord each dignity, respect, and the assurance that his/her needs and views will be taken into account. The signs of leadership appear primarily in the character of followers and in the institution's ability to achieve its most ambitious goals. (ALB)

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SERVANTS OF THE DREAM

Thomas W. Fryer, Jr.

June 12, 1989

Paper presented at the conference of the League for Innovation in the Community College, "Leadership 2000," San Francisco, CA, June 11-14, 1989.

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Servants of the Dream

by

Thomas W. Fryer, Jr.

Keynote Address
Leadership 2000 Conference
San Francisco, California
June 12, 1989

I always look forward to speaking to audiences like this because I feel a very special comradeship with men and women whose lives, like my own, are engaged in the work of the community college movement. It was called the junior college movement when I got into it thirty years ago, and as far as I am concerned, the term "junior college" is still perfectly usable. It reminds us that within the comprehensive mission of the modern community college there is embedded an historic core of transfer and occupational education. We neglect these basic missions at our peril.

Our friend David Breneman, who wrote the book Financing Community Colleges a few years ago, was recently quoted in the Washington Post as saying, "The hallmark of a successful community college is trying to maximize the percent of the local population that crosses the door. It can be college courses, but if that isn't selling, it will be training in the local plant, and if that isn't selling, it will be poodle grooming."[1] Breneman has previously said that community colleges have no soul; now he says we merely sell. Unfair as his comments may be, they call us to remember that at our heart lies a junior college mission whose integrity we must thoughtfully care for, and in this context I'd like to suggest that tomorrow afternoon's symposium sponsored by the National Effective Transfer Consortium is one you should attend.

I was pleased when the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges began its report with the statement that our segment "is, perhaps, the only sector of higher education that can truly be called a **movement**."[2] One doesn't hear of the liberal arts college "movement," or the land grant university "movement." But for those of us in the community college family the word "movement" has special meaning because of the unique history and missions of our institutions. We tend to be bound together by shared values and common ideals. We are inspired by common aspirations.

These ideals and aspirations have recently found voice in major new legislation here in California, in a law which eloquently says, "The community colleges embody an historic commitment to provide an opportunity for college instruction for all Californians capable of benefiting from instruction."[3] "The state's future as a healthy and free, diverse, and creative society depends in major part on the commitments expressed through and in the community colleges....(These) colleges educate hundreds of thousands of Californians every year, are the route to higher education for the majority of our people, provide access to language and citizenship for tens of thousands of immigrants annually, retrain workers in an economy changing more rapidly than any in history, and are the last hope for older citizens seeking skills and involvement in their communities."[4]

This is the language of our ideals, our dream, our movement. It was enacted by the California legislature, but it could have emerged in a number of our states. Our society is grappling with enormously complex issues, and many states are realizing the critical role that their still youthful community colleges can play in successfully facing these challenges.

We have been assigned important roles by our society, and our responsibility is to perform, to get the job done, to deliver the goods. Ladies and gentlemen, the extent to which we get the job done

rests, as much as anything else, upon both management and leadership, upon those of us in this room and many like us all across the country who occupy positions of authority in our institutions.

The theme of this conference is leadership. Our ignorance and uncertainty concerning the meaning and operation of leadership today far outdistance our knowledge, but we've learned a great deal about it since I was in graduate school. We know more about it than we did when Harvard's Institute for Educational Management--the IEM--was first proposed in 1965. If Harvard were creating this program today, I daresay it might be called the Institute for Educational Leadership.

Among the things we've learned across these years is that having the title of chancellor or president or dean doesn't mean that you are either a manager or a leader. We've also learned that trustees who play administrator almost invariably do their colleges more harm than good. They create conditions under which neither management nor leadership can occur. And we've learned that management and leadership, while closely related, are two different things and that to achieve maximum effectiveness, our colleges must have both. I'd like to suggest some differences between these ideas for you to consider.

Management is concerned with doing things right. Leadership is concerned with doing the right things.

Managers have subordinates who are obligated to perform their assigned duties. Leaders have followers whose contribution is entirely voluntary.

Managers expect compliance from subordinates. Leaders inspire commitment from followers.

Managers are concerned with the structure of the organization. Leaders are concerned with the climate of the institution.

Managers are guided by MBO's. Leaders are guided by overarching purposes.

Managers are occupied with today. Leaders are occupied with tomorrow.

Managers are like contractors who build buildings. Leaders are like architects who design buildings.

Management almost always takes place in the formal organization structure. Leadership can, and does, occur anywhere.

We were not as knowledgeable about these matters twenty-five years ago. And the people who live in our communities and work in our colleges are different from their counterparts a quarter century ago. Daniel Yankelovich published New Rules in 1981, one year before Tom Peters and Bob Waterman published In Search of Excellence. In some respects the books were companion volumes. Yankelovich borrowed a metaphor from geology to help us understand the new rules he discovered emerging in our society. He suggested that the changes his research identified over the previous two-and-a-half decades were comparable to movements in the earth deep beneath the surface, creating tension among the giant plates that comprise the earth's crust.

He noted that in the 1950's 70 percent of all American households consisted of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and one or more children. By the 1980's this dominant arrangement had virtually disappeared, and comprised only 15 percent of the households. He talked about vast shifts in the composition of the workplace, with men slowly edging out of the workforce while women and working mothers poured in. He talked about older Americans becoming less miserable, anxious and depressed than in the past while young people grew more fretful, off balance and goalless. But he also talked about things that hadn't changed--the persistent

continuity of the values of small town, middle-America and the paradox of change and continuity coexisting.[3]

One of the themes in his book has to do with the gradual emergence of an American aspiration that went beyond financial affluence and the desire for material well-being. He found new personal demands for autonomy and connectedness, for participation, caring and community. He described this inchoate aspiration as an emerging struggle to find what he called a new social ethic--the ethic of commitment.

Peters and Waterman, revieving over 80 years of research and organizational theory in their look at excellent companies, talked about metaphor, paradox, and the limits of structure and rationality. They began talking about a new theory for understanding organizations. Their theory included four insights into basic human needs in organizations. 1) People need a sense of meaning. 2) People need at least a modicum of control. 3) People need positive reinforcement; they need to think of themselves as winners in some sense. And 4) actions and behaviors shape attitudes and beliefs rather than vice versa.[4]

What does all this mean for us today? It means, I believe, that we find ourselves at an important point in our journey. The golden age in which community colleges were being established at the rate of one a week has passed. Our illusions that the barriers of prejudice and economic inequality will easily collapse have been profoundly shaken.

We must not, however, conclude that because our illusions have been challenged, disillusionment must take their place; that because there are no easy answers, there are no working solutions; or that because leading is more complicated than it used to be, that leadership can no longer make a difference. We are at a place in our journey where our dreams must be cherished and nurtured, because when ideals have sunk to the level of practice, the result is stagnation.

This is a time and place for hard, sustained work; for informed, sophisticated thinking; and for the renewal of our commitment to the ideas that animate our institutions.

The report of the National Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, "Building Communities," points the way. As our movement and our institutions look to the year 2000, leadership is needed for three purposes: creating climates, building communities, and realizing our maximum potential in serving our missions. Our futures commission report is well-written and clear-sighted in its vision of these purposes.

The report's focus is on community colleges as teaching and learning institutions. Its themes speak to the essence as well as the evolution of our mission, and to the imperatives both of change and continuity as we approach 2000. Of community, the report says, "The term community should be defined not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created."

"A climate to be created!" I have come to believe that the creation of climates that evoke commitment, enhance excellence, and attract and nurture persons who desire continuous improvement is one of the most important tasks that leaders are challenged to perform.

My current sense of how such climates operate is this. The environment or climate for learning experienced by our students is created by the people with whom they come into personal contact. First, of course, is the faculty. But students also interact with secretaries and support staff; and they interact with the physical environment that owes so much of its quality to the work of our groundsmen and custodians and painters and carpenters and others.

The climate within which the faculty and support staff do their work is created principally by the first and middle levels of administration. The climate within which these people do their work

is created by the top administration, particularly the CEO. And at the institutional level both the CEO's position and the climate that senior managers work in is created by the board of trustees.

In organizations almost everything starts at the top. Organizations turn the structure of buildings upside down. In a building the foundation is at the bottom. In an institution the foundation is at the top.

The most important work of the board of trustees is not hiring the CEO but creating the position the CEO occupies and the atmosphere in which he or she works. If the board or its individual members creates a miniature position that offers little scope for independent discretion, requires the CEO to get permission before doing anything, seldom leaves the CEO alone, second guesses everything he or she does, no leadership will ever occur. Such boards may or may not get competent management, but they'll never get leadership.

Meantime, the CEO creates the climate that influences the weather throughout the organization. The same principles apply. Some CEO's behave as though they are the only intelligent adults in the organization, as though no one else could care for the institution as a whole. With the exception of a few senior staff, perhaps, they treat everyone else like children, hoarding information or manipulating processes to validate a decision they've already reached. Other CEO's seem to need to ensure they always look better than everyone else; they try to do this by creating tiny little positions for all the other folks, making all the decisions, monopolizing discretion, discouraging initiative, and trying to control what everyone does by rules and directives.

It's actually possible to have a pretty good school that treats people this way--a good school maybe, but not a great one. If you aspire to excellence, if you believe your people have a right to meaning from their work, that they have a right to a modicum of control, that they have a right to a deep sense of personal

satisfaction, of joy, from coming to work every day, you must treat them very differently, at every level.

By the way, none of this is new stuff. To make that point I'd like to recommend a book that demonstrates just how long these principles have been operating. Unlike most books on leadership, this one has two powerful things going for it. First, it's just 100 short pages long, which means that most of us administrators can read it in six or eight sittings without overtaxing our attention spans. Second, it's titled The Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun, so it's a book about someone with whom we can identify.[7]

It's possible that the book presents something of a revisionist view of Attila. The author, Wess Roberts, puts words in Attila's mouth, and Attila comes across as a bit of a nice guy, attracted, as he says, by "the novel uncertainties of pillage." "Looting," he says, "is simply a part of post battle etiquette." But revisionist or not as to Attila's personality, it is true that before he came along, the Huns were a chaotic and fragmented rabble of nomadic tribes. Attila united this pugnacious people with a vision of conquering and plundering the world, and it is estimated that the size of the army he fielded in the service of this vision was as large as 700,000 warriors.

For our purposes today it is sufficient to note only a couple of Attilaisms. On the importance of selecting the right aspirations Attila says, "Superficial goals lead to superficial results." And of organizational climate Attila says, "Chieftans and leaders in every subordinate office are responsible for establishing the atmosphere in which they lead. This atmosphere may have periods of change even as the seasons change. Nonetheless, unlike our lack of influence over the weather, our leaders can and must influence and control the spirit of our tribes."

Encouraging the spirit of our people is essential if we are to develop the kind of institutional climate that evokes commitment from

them. Leadership lies at the heart of creating this climate. It also lies at the heart of building community in our institutions. Our efforts to build such communities are usefully informed by the long struggle to build community in our nation.

Twenty-five years ago last summer, in August of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and gave what I believe history will judge to be a statement as significant as many of the noblest statements of the founding fathers in its vision of the ideals of this nation.

For many of us, especially those of us who are not people of color, it is hard to remember the times in which Dr. King's speech was given. The white and colored waiting rooms and water fountains that I grew up with in the South are gone. Black people are not required to ride in the back of busses and they are not prohibited from eating at lunch counters or swimming in public swimming pools.

These and other details of what some might call an American version of apartheid are, as I say, easy for some of us to forget. But they are vivid and deeply painful personal memories for others. They seem so foreign to some of us today, so, almost, South African. But they are not foreign at all.

All across America incidents occur with disturbing regularity that reflect contempt for other human beings simply because of their color. Last fall the Chronicle of Higher Education carried a story about a black, pre-med student who walked into his French class on the University of Michigan campus and found a note scribbled on the chalkboard that read, "Support the Ku Klux Klan college fund. A mind is a terrible thing to waste, especially on a nigger."

I tell the story and use the word to make a point. Prejudice is a subject that arouses strong feelings in all of us, so strong in some cases that the feelings drive out our capacity to examine issues rationally. I am deeply troubled by the permission that an

increasing number of people seem to give themselves these days to express such mean-spirited feelings about fellow human beings and to do so merely on the basis of the person's color, or culture, or religion, or sex, or sexual preference, or age.

Please try to think with me on this subject for a few moments. I take it on directly for several reasons. First, I am troubled. Second, I share Dr. King's dream, as I'm sure many of you do, of a society in which people "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Third, in my opinion, we are not discussing these issues either in our country or in our colleges openly and constructively. Fourth, the very existence of the community college rests fundamentally on the social value of democratizing opportunity. If we betray that value, we lose the moral authority that empowers us. And lastly, we in community colleges must not fall victim to the accusation that has been made of us, namely, that we perpetuate an economic underclass by providing the illusion of education in what is in reality an educational and economic cul-de-sac.

This is an enormously complicated matter. Not all racists are white. The humane aspects of all cultures, including that of white America, have legitimacy and standing to exist. If we create an environment in which the epithet, "White males need not apply," is in fact true, then we have also compromised our values. And if the phrase, "affirmative action," ever becomes a code phrase for any compromise on quality or excellence, at that moment we will have betrayed both our institutions and those we seek to serve.

But, my friends, we must also acknowledge the special exposure, the special vulnerability, the special history, and in many cases the special disadvantages that minorities experience in trying to compete effectively in our society. We must, I believe, summon the will, create the ideas, and allocate the resources to achieve the kind of genuine community in our institutions that is characterized by fundamental respect and hard won understanding for the differences

among us. We must institutionalize that respect and understanding by building into our colleges both people and programs that can address the unique needs that such differences create.

We have been working on these tough issues in Foothill-De Anza. I will not take the time of this audience to tell you what we have accomplished, but I believe that we have achieved important results in two areas: written hiring procedures that combine a dual emphasis on quality and affirmative action, and an organizational structure that integrates concern for affirmative action into every level of the institution instead of localizing it in a kind of affirmative action police department. If you are interested in what we have done, leave me one of your cards, and we will be happy to send our material to you.

It is true that any person who simply gives up because he or she is called an obscene name is not going to get very far in a world that is hard on everyone. But it is also true that a campus that does not strive to eliminate mean-spiritedness and disrespect for others is not much of a community. There can be no second class citizens in the communities that you and I are called upon to build today, not for reason of color and not for reason of station in the organization.

Leaders must acknowledge the legitimate stake that every individual has in the institution. In that famous passage from his "Devotions," John Donne says, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . .Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind;. . . Therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

For me this is an enobling idea, and there is, I believe, a corollary in organizations. Every person in our colleges, as I see it, is entitled to dignity and respect, to have his or her reasonable needs and views taken into account, to be heard and responded to as a

human being. To the extent that any of us, or any of our structures or processes, denies any of these things to anyone, we are all diminished. Perhaps those of us in places of responsibility are diminished most of all.

Again, I will not take the time of this audience to tell you how we try in Foothill-De Anza to put these ideals into practice, but in our symposium this afternoon, "Wider Horizons for Leadership," we will discuss one of our initiatives and we will distribute a paper that describes this effort that is very important to us.

The aspiration to build community is enormously challenging. Community requires trust, the empowerment of people at every level, openness, the kind of intimacy that accepts the risk of being vulnerable to others, and there is, of course, that frightening question, "If community requires trust, who trusts first?" My answer is the answer that Jim Kouses and Barry Posner give in their book The Leadership Challenge: They say, "Trust is a risk game. The leader must ante first."

Why is it important that leadership be concerned with creating climates that foster commitment and developing communities that are people-building rather than merely people-using? It's important because only through such communities and climates will we be able to reach our maximum potential in achieving the diverse, multiple missions that have been assigned to us and that we have willingly accepted.

The same new law in California that affirms the ideals of our movement sets forth the following tasks for us to perform:

* meeting the need for a reinvigorated transfer program

* providing quality courses and programs for students who do not desire to transfer or who already possess a baccalaureate degree

* providing vocational and technical education, including both academic and certificate programs that are sensitive to current economic developments and trends

* meeting the "massive and growing demand in this state for remedial education," a goal which requires operating successful assessment, counseling, placement and related support services

* providing courses in English as a second language as well as programs in noncredit adult education, including adult literacy and citizenship

We are told in this law to address the goal that by the year 2005 the system's work force will reflect proportionately the adult population of the state, and that by the year 1992-93, 30 percent of all new hires in the California Community Colleges as a system will be ethnic minorities.

The law attempts to increase the percent of the hours of credit instruction taught by full-time instructors from the current 67 percent to 75 percent during the next few years and to do this by providing funds for converting part-time positions into new full-time jobs.

And as further encouragement to us the law says, "It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this act, to strengthen the capacity of the community colleges to meet the emerging needs of our state, and in particular, to better ensure that all Californians are offered a chance, challenged and taught with imagination and inspiration, offered assistance and counseling, and held to honest standards."

These challenges are no greater than those you face in your own states. They're no greater that those set forth in "Building

Communities." The missions we serve in this ever-changing society constitute a marvelously rich and endlessly sustaining assignment for our institutions and for us. These missions cry out for leadership; they will not be achieved without it.

Clark Kerr concluded the speech he gave to this conference last night on the topic "Governance Makes a Difference" by asking an important rhetorical question. He wondered whether a gap has been created by the new pressures upon our institutions to perform, on the one hand, and the fact that leadership seems to have been constrained in so many ways, on the other. I say of course such a gap has been created. Our job is not to complain about it. Our job is to discover ways to fill it.

This spring in my community college leadership class at Berkeley we spent an evening talking about how presidents lose their jobs, and how presidents fail, yet retain their jobs. The latter is a more important subject for our purposes this morning than the former.

The median age of my students was 36; most had community college experience. It was a promising group of future leaders. Here are some of the ways in which they suggested presidents can fail yet keep their jobs:

* attempt no great things

* have no vision, carefully maintain the status quo

* stay in tight with the board, but fail to serve the institution

* don't delegate, hoard information, attempt to make yourself indispensible

* blame subordinates for mistakes

* ignore the problems raised by non-supporters

* be a professional jetsetter, spend a lot of time away

* see problems, but do nothing about them

* be good on money but not on education

None of us is perfect, my friends, but it is not our weaknesses that are my topic here--Attila points out that strong chieftans always have strong weaknesses--the question is what we do about them.

The people I'm talking to today are those among you who want to do something about them, who aspire to be better than you are, to those who feel you are somehow yet unfinished, who aspire to grow, who believe that the growth of the human spirit is one of the great ends of human existence. I'm talking to those of you who aspire both for yourselves and your institutions to be the best you can be.

Of all the books on leadership and management I have read, the one I most wish I had written is a little book that Tom Peters told me about, titled Leadership Is An Art, by the chairman and CEO of the Herman Miller furniture company, a man named Max De Pree. In his introduction to the book Jim O'Toole, whose opinions I respect, calls it the best book ever written on the subject of business leadership. I don't know about that, but it's the best book I've ever read on the subject, and I can tell you it's as beautifully applicable to community colleges as it is to the furniture business.

Like Attila, it's a short book, and it has lovely chapter titles. "Theory Fastball," "Why Should I Weep?" "Intimacy," "The Marks of Elegance" and "Pink Ice in the Urinals" are a few. It's wonderful. In it De Pree talks about leadership as a condition of indebtedness. He talks about leaders as people who abandon themselves to the gifts of others, who do not give pain but who bear pain, who possess special responsibility for the future, and who

leave behind them assets and a legacy. The signs of leadership, he says, appear primarily among the followers, and he talks about "those of us who have received the gift of leadership from the people we lead."

It's a book about growth and aspiration. It's a book that will touch you, if you can be touched, in the deep places where you live. Its meanings are fused with Robert Greenleaf's idea of servant leadership, the notion that Jesus expressed when he said, "Whoso would be greatest among you must be servant of all."

The idea of the servant as leader is not widely accepted today. It's not universally known, and for a great many people in high positions, the last thing they have on their mind is being a servant to anyone. But for me the idea is enormously challenging and appealing. What is servant leadership? Perhaps the best test, Greenleaf says, is this: do those who are being served by leaders "grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in (our institutions); will (they) benefit, or, at least, will (they) not be further deprived?"[10] In other words, the quality of leadership is revealed in the character of the followers.

These are difficult tests. They don't fit easily with large quantities of self-satisfaction. But the tests of leadership are no more difficult than the work of leadership: ensuring that our institutions achieve their maximum potential in serving our missions--the teaching and learning of our students.

In this speech I have talked a good deal about aspiration. In this work of ours, if we are committed to it and to the relentless pursuit of getting better at it, we find that our aspirations always outdistance our achievements. But aspiration forms and energizes achievement, so it is important what we aspire to do and to become.

The great vision that Dr. King articulated a quarter century ago, the theme that still resonates in those places within us where our most noble strivings live, those words that ring in our hearts are, "I have a dream."

Last spring at Foothill College's commencement one of the student speakers was a young Hispanic woman named Diane Estrada. She opened her talk by saying to the staff, "For the last few months I've been racking my brain trying to think of a method to communicate ... that what you are doing here is invaluable, that you do indeed give people a second chance; you save people."

She had written a fable about a wildebeest and a springbok on the African veldt. In this fable a young animal that thought herself a misfit wildebeest discovered through the transforming power of aspiration that she was in fact a springbok, a gazelle. Diane ended her talk by saying to her fellow students and to us, "HOLD DEAR YOUR WILDEST SECRET DREAMS ABOUT YOURSELF, BECAUSE SOMEDAY YOU MIGHT DISCOVER THAT YOU ARE AS YOU DREAM YOURSELF TO BE."

My aspiration is to be a servant of those dreams. I believe this is the aspiration of our movement. It is a joy to be your colleague in this great work we share.

NOTES

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4 Ibid., pp. 9-10.

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